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ABSTRACT

The intent of this brief paper is two-fold: (1) to review selected past studies and discuss what is believed to be misdirections in their focus and inadequate methodology and (2) to report a series of studies that attempt to counter these shortcomings. It is held that, by focusing on discrete components, such as curriculum, and using limiting measures, such as questionnaires, previous work has failed to provide adequate insight into the process of political socialization in the school. For this reason, looking at informal peer interaction by means of observation was chosen in this study. The primary methodology of the Schwartz and Lopate studies described in this paper was participant observation in the schools, observations being supplemented by interviews with staff, parents, and children. A playground study used a more systematic observation methodology. The observed students were in middle childhood, between nine and eleven years of age. The paper concludes that it is clearly in interaction in the peer group that children are able to learn and practice political skills, whereas (1) the textbook as a learning resource makes children docile and believe in the symbolic idealized picture of politics and (2) pupil time in the classroom is largely reacting against teachers and the school and hardly in political socialization. (Author/JM)

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Schools and Peers in the Political Socialization of the Urban Poor

Charles Harrington

Successful political socialization requires that a child learn to reap premiums from a less than bountiful crop. Premiums may be anything in short supply in a given society—material goods, power, status, safety. Knowledge about formal government and its processes constitutes only a part of political learning because political decisions that affect an individual are made both within and outside of the formal processes. If people are unaware of the variety of modes and channels of supply and demand, they run the risk either of missing the opportunity to gain more than they have or of losing that which they have already gained. A child's political socialization, then, becomes a source of success in reaping society's premiums.

The intent of this brief presentation of information about the political socialization of American children is twofold: (1) to review selected past studies and discuss what I believe to be misdirections in their focus and inadequate methodology, and (2) to report a series of studies conducted under my direction that attempt to counter the shortcomings of previous research.

Previous Studies

The focus of political socialization studies of children can be fairly criticized on two counts: for emphasizing white mainstream children and for employing a narrow conceptualization of politics. The Jaros et al. (1968) study illustrates the fallacy of examining only white mainstream subjects. When Jaros and his colleagues studied the political orientations of children living in the impoverished Appalachian region of Kentucky, and compared their results with findings of the previous research on middle-class, white (sub-) urban children, they noted that the poor rural children demonstrated *less* positive views of the President and generally *more* cynical attitudes toward politics. Thus, the authors concluded that children's views of political authority are probably subculture-bound. The Jaros study brings to our attention the error of generalizing to other groups (e.g., blacks) conclusions about political socialization derived from studies of white middle-class children.

The limited definition of politics in the existing political socialization literature (which is largely a product of the fields of political science and psychology) is primarily concerned with ways in which knowledge supportive of Western governmental institutions is transmitted from one generation to the next. Such an orientation has given rise to studies about the age at which a child recognizes his flag (Lawson, 1963), attitudes toward the President (Sigel, 1965), attitudes toward Congress (Hess and Torney, 1967), and so forth. As Easton (1968) and Sigel (1966) have suggested, the literature is largely concerned with the acquisition of the knowledge and attitudes that support these familiar institutions or traditions while failing to consider the knowledge of and attitudes about political activity (such as rioting) that does not support them. Even when the literature escapes the first problem I mentioned and looks at nonwhite groups, the second is still present.[1] As illustration, the subtitle of Bullock and Rodgers' book (1972) on black political attitudes is *Implications for Political Support!* The same criticism can be made of several recent studies of black political socialization. (See Greenberg, 1970, Lyons, 1970, Engstrom, 1970, Rodgers and Taylor, 1971, Orum and Cohen, 1973, Garcia, 1973, Jaros and Kolson, 1974, and Liebschutz and Niemi, 1974; but see also Button, 1974 and Laurence, 1970.)

Much of the mainstream literature has emphasized the role of formal schooling in political socialization. The Hess and Torney (1967) study is illustrative. The authors found that the school is the most important agent of political socialization. (Family influence is limited primarily to generalized attitudes toward authority and partisan attachments.)The school stresses the child's emotional attachment to his nation and his obligation to vote, and emphasizes rules of social behavior, particularly veneration of authorities, such as "the law" or "the President." Teachers responsible for civics instruction maintain that their most important goals are the child's acquisition of knowledge about governmental institutions and of favorable attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes. They do little teaching of the skills necessary

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1. Further, these studies do not properly define ethnicity. One conspicuous exception is Hirsh (1974). See Harrington (forthcoming) for a full critique.

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for democratic participation, such as belonging to political parties or pressure groups or expressing dissent. The curriculum centers on turning out "good citizens"—those who defer to established legal authority, who conform to community rules and laws without questioning their purpose, who do not "make trouble," (Massialas, 1975). According to Hess and Torney, these attitudes are reinforced by teachers who "place particular stress upon compliance, de-emphasizing all other topics," a characteristic of teachers of classes through the seventh grade. Stress on compliance is reflected in children's perceptions of democracy: to sixth graders, democracy means "helping the class," "being kind and friendly," "not fighting or cheating," obeying teachers and school laws," "trying to be quiet."[2]

There is a tendency among the political socialization studies to focus on only one aspect of the educational process. For example, to Langton and Jennings (1968) school means curriculum. Findings for their white sample, however, showed that the civics curriculum had little effect on students' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings toward government. To Edgar Litt (1963), school means textbooks. Litt reports a comparative study of civic education in three Boston communities with differing socioeconomic characteristics and differing levels of political activity. His data was drawn from the civic education texts used in the three communities during a five-year period, interviews with community leaders and educational administrators on their views of the community's civic education program, and questionnaires administered to civic education classes (and control groups) in the major high school in each community. The results showed that the textbooks of the two middle-class communities emphasized citizen participation to a greater degree than those used in the working-class community. Only in the upper-middle-class community was there an attempt to transmit a view of politics as a political process involving political action and the use of power as a means for resolving group conflict.

I have argued elsewhere (Adler and Harrington, 1970) that what is notably lacking is attention to information processes within the schools and to peer group relations. Kenneth Langton (1967) is unusual among students of political socialization in demonstrating the importance of peers.[3] His findings are flawed, however, by his attention to only one measure, social class of peers; by his failure to examine directly peer interaction; and by his confining his definition of politics to attitudes about a particular system. We learn little from Langton's study about acquisition of skills needed for participation in a democratic society. Anthropological literature indirectly offers data to complement the political socialization literature in the area of peer influence. For example, Mayer and Mayer (1970) describe an age-grade system through which children advance in stages, each of which successively places more constraints upon them. Control is in the hands of peers. Younger children are members of largely local groups in which aggression and sex play are tolerated if not encouraged. As the children move through the peer system they learn rules which increasingly control their aggressiveness and inculcate a respect for the "law" until they become adults. In adulthood disputes are settled by law (argument) not by sticks (fighting). What is interesting here is that while the youth organizations are free of adult control, the peer-run socialization devices lead to successful entrance into the role of adult.

Perhaps the literature has neglected peers, in part, because of the dominance of an assumption that peer groups are characterized by "compulsive independence in relation to certain adult expectations...which in certain cases is expressed in overt defiance...or a certain recalcitrance to pressure of adult discipline" (Parsons, 1949, p.221). Since the political socialization literature has been concerned with the support of political tradition, such an assumption would preclude studies of peer effects. However, whether peer groups are rebellious, insulated from or integrated with adult culture, they offer their members an opportunity to practice and perfect political skills; they provide "a junior forum whose members, in a kind of earliest play, practice the political skills they will need in the real forum later on" (Mayer and Mayer, 1970, p.174). This view of peer group learning is lent support by cognitive developmental psychology, as propounded by Kohlberg (1969), who argues that peer groups provide an opportunity to practice the behaviors that the culture (or elders) prescribe as desirable. Since studies in developmental psychology (see Hartup, 1969) show middle childhood to be the period of "greatest responsiveness to normative influence of peers," the absence of studies of peer effects in the political socialization literature is all the more startling and the need for study evident.

Studies of Peer Effects and Information Processes

Before describing the studies of the process of political socialization, a general note on methodology is in order. The ways in which one conceptualizes an issue for investigation and designs and carries out a study determine, in large measure, the outcomes. Political socialization literature has been limited to certain designs. The reliance on questionnaire measures particularly has had the effect of conceptually separating school, family, and peer effects because of the way these variables are distinguished from one another. Further, there is the question of the validity of data generated from primary school children by paper and pencil tests. Thus, because our concern was to investigate informal interaction, process, and peer effects in the school with regard to political socialization, we chose observational methodology. Participant observation done by an anthropologist requires large amounts of time, and is, rather than one method, an interweaving of observational interviewing and other cross-validating techniques. Through such a methodology one can obtain almost immediately an overview of the classroom processes, and then see the same things occuring for several days. At this point initially perceived patterns begin to prove inadequate as analytic tools. It is as if one reaches another level. Reaching this level does not nec-

2. Adler and Harrington (1970) have suggested that the undemocratic ways of our schools are not unintentional but are, in fact, functional. It appears beyond question that a large percentage of our society tolerates authoritarian methods, at times, in order to conserve order. Since schools are training children to accept authoritarianism, they are supported, and attempts to change them so as to give students power are resisted.

3. See also Billings (1972), Cave (1972), and Jennings, Niemi and Sebert (1974).

essarily invalidate the initially hypothesized structures, but without this level the structures seem an inadequate description. It is not that through further observations one discovers his original overview of the classroom structures to be incorrect, but that through further observations one sees patterns o responses to those structures. Finally, one can see the interplay or lack of it, between students and the structures provided by the school. Goffman (1961) might have called this "the underlife of the institution." By focusing on discrete components, such as curriculum, and using limiting measures, such as questionnaires, previous work has failed to provide adequate insight into the process of political socialization in the school. For this reason, we chose to look at informal peer interaction by means of observation.

Method/Setting/Subjects

The primary methodology of the Schwartz and Lopate studies (described below) was participant observation in the schools involving 14 months and 3 months time, respectively. The Schwartz observations were supplemented by interviews with staff, parents, and children. Lopate's observations were supplemented by interviews with staff and videotape analyses. The playground study (below) used a more systematic observation methodology in examining peer interaction, following the work of Whiting et al. (1966) and Whiting and Whiting (1970). Approximately 26 full time equivalent months were spent in the variety of settings investigated.

The neighborhood in which our observations were made is approximately 45% Spanish-speaking—made up of equal numbers of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (the most recent arrivals), and lesser numbers of Cubans—and 10% white. The neighborhood is striated into ethnic enclaves, blacks situated in the east, Spanish speaking in the center, and the middle-class white community segregated to the west. The populations in the various schools serving this neighborhood are variations on the above figures. The whites tend to be even more under-represented because the children often attend private schools. The neighborhood was formerly a Jewish and Irish area which has undergone population changes in the last ten years. People who live there now have moved up and away from areas they consider much worse either physically (like Harlem, part of Brooklyn, the East Bronx), or economically, (like Puerto Rico and Haiti).

We chose this area for our studies not only on theoretical but also on practical grounds. These students are the children of parents who have not been able to compete successfully for premiums. We wanted to know what, if anything, the schools are doing to change the situation by providing these children with the tools necessary for political efficacy.

Following the assumption of cognitive developmental psychology discussed above, all of the subjects of our observations were in middle childhood, between 9 and 11 years of age.

Findings

I will briefly summarize the major findings of our observational studies in terms of pupils, peers, and pupils and ritual. Then I will discuss a study of textbooks used in many of the schools, which I conducted in order to complement our observational data.

Pupils. By pupils we mean the children as they behave in school (arbitrarily distinguishing them from "peers" or children interacting outside of school). Frances Schwartz undertook the ethnographic description of the child's culture with an emphasis on peer group relations (as opposed to home life). We take as given that school requires children to respond to institutional requirements and that these vary within the school itself. On the basis of her observation, Schwartz distinguished three settings within the school itself. The first she labels "instructional time" (in class when a teacher is giving a particular lesson); the second, "lunch time" when children structure their own activities and have to do so without adult supervision; and the third, "noninstructional" classroom time when children can talk among themselves less competitively than would be possible in setting two, presumably because of the potential offered by the presence of an adult.

Schwartz found that a good deal of pupil time in the classroom was spent reacting against the teachers and the school. Yet she also observed dynamic processes among the students, shifting interactions between groups, tightening and loosening of boundaries in response to school situations and peer-generated action patterns. She generalized that in learning time, alliances are networks of communication or identification against the teacher and other children. At lunch, self-created rules lay groundworks for group formations which maintain lines of political interests and meet needs for protection of members. Finally, in classroom noninstructional time the process is less bounded, more around interests and less around alliance protection.

In addition, Schwartz distinguishes among the three classrooms she studied. The first was an intellectually gifted class (IGC), the second a middle-ability class, the third a lower-ability group (ability is defined in New York City schools for classification purposes as reading test scores). While the patterns for school settings described above run throughout all three classrooms, each class is different in the content of its interactions, and these too are seen as largely peer-generated. For example, during the IGC's instructional time, students share an intellectural life with the teacher and a separate social life with their peers, while in the middle-ability class students compete with one another acedemically as well as physically, and in the lower-ability class students' play effectively blocks all academic efforts. In the noninstructional classroom time the IGC students' unity in the face of academic pressures dissolves into "tough" behavior, while the middle-ability class students set up their own school by teaching themselves, and the lower-ability class students' interactions drift into reflections about life outside school.

Peers. We also examined the forms of social organization that would be manifested by children in the absence of any immediate adult supervision—peer interaction proper. Focusing on a playground not attached to the school, we followed our definition of politics by observing interaction centered on three swings. As the swings fit our definition of a scarce resource (there being more than three children on the playground most of the time), we systematically observed how children made decisions about how those swings were allocated. What we found was quite remarkable: in the times of great

demands children act not to maximize possession of a swing but rather to maximize access to a swing. There are low frequencies of conflict and aggression. There are rules which are understood by the children that they can activate to get swings without resorting to violence. Indeed, it is on the playground that we have seen the most amount of practice of political skills designed to foster political efficacy. That is, it is in the peer group that the children are able to learn and practice political skills. Violence is less common here than in the school. It may be that in a more adult-centered setting children experience more frustration leading to aggressive behavior. This interpretation would be compatible with Schwartz's interpretation of her classrooms.

Pupils and ritual. In another study, Carol Lopate focused on pupil-staff interaction in a somewhat different way from Schwartz. Discrepancies between what people did and what people said they were doing led her to analyze her observations from the perspective provided for ritual events and symbols by Gluckman (1962) and Turner (1969). She, for example, observed a school teetering on the brink of organizational disaster sending parents a letter on how wonderful this school was for their children.

I was once taken by a principal to observe a bilingual junior high classroom, described by the principal as we approached. "It signaled a new age of understanding and communication among peoples." "It provided students with the tools necessary to communicate effectively with their peers, teachers" etc., and "would make it possible for them to learn in Spanish, what they had previously not been able to learn in English." When we arrived at the door of the classroom, the teacher emerged and the principal explained our desire to observe. She said, "I'm sorry you can't come in today. I'm not speaking to them. They were so bad yesterday that I am punishing them." So much for the symbols of the manifest curriculum.

Equally interesting is the suggestion implicit in some of Lopate's material that the teachers themselves are socialized by the school experience. These materials show a teacher who has learned the passivity (docility) lessons well.

> Miss Mera got a directive to take her class to a new room for snacks. Not asking why, and not explaining to the students, she simply led them to a new room. She waited patiently for new orders while her children waited, somewhat less acquiescently, behind her.

After lessons on individual rights, what is learned when entire classes of third graders are marched to the girls' and boys' room at the same time? As to justice, we can watch as an accusation against a boy by a monitor is immediately sanctioned by a teacher with no due process, or watch one boy being punished by a teacher for something several others had done earlier without punishment. Adler and Harrington (1970) argued that children learned potent lessons from this "latent" curriculum, specifically that children learned that in the allocation of premiums in the school some are privileged and some are not.

Not only do children learn status definitions (e.g., who can make whom wait—time=scarce resource), but they are being led to accept a rhetoric of reality that contradicts their own experiences: the school is successful, they are happy, they are learning to be bilingual, etc. However, for the ghetto child the reality of his life outside the school and the skills he needs to function there become separated from the view of the world provided him by the positively charged symbolic representations of the school life. At a luncheon debate between a political scientist and myself, we focused on this issue. The political scientist argued that the disparity between the ideal and the real was a good thing, giving the child incentive to change the system and make it more nearly approximate the ideal. I argued that if the picture of politics presented was so idealized that the child perceived it to be a sham, he could become alienated from the political process. Further, I argued that the ghetto child was getting no training in school which would increase his efficacy even if he were motivated to act. However, the practice he gets in his peer group in successfully acquiring scarce resources may complement the other (school) learning[4] by preparing him successfully for political action,but not necessarily the kind envisioned by mainstream theorists!

Textbooks

I carried out an analysis of the content of textbooks likely to be used in the school in order to gauge what children were being told about American government so that I could compare it with the rest of what they learned about politics. The analysis was part of a larger study of textbooks used in New York State, reported elsewhere (Harrington and Adler, 1971) and can be broken down into three components—*authority*, *regime*, and *community*—following Easton's (1965) systems theory, which provides an oft-used means for viewing the interrelationship of diverse threads in the fabric of political life. An *authority*, according to Easton, is a member of the system in whom the primary responsibility is lodged for taking care of the system's daily routines. Elected representatives and other public officials such as civil servants qualify as *authority* in the American system.[5] In the larger study I found that not every class in eight districts representative of New York State education is receiving books with similar attitude orientations to pol-

4. See, for example, Wittes (1972).

5. *Regime* refers to the underlying goals that the members of the system pursue, the norms or rules of the game through which they conduct their political business, and the formal and informal structures or authority that arrange who is to do what in the system. (It is clear that the national regime and the regime of the playground are distinct.) Easton defines *community* (he calls it *political community*) as that aspect of a political system we can identify as a collection of persons who desire a division of political labor.

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itical authorities. Younger grades (2-4) receive a more positively charged view than higher grades (6-8). Apparently, younger children are not to be "trusted" with the more balanced views of authorities that are to be found in older children's texts. There is also bias in the preparation of children for a place in the democratic system that seems to hold up, if not everywhere, at least frequently. There is a tendency for the grade effects to be limited to middle-class districts, i.e., the texts used by older grades in working-class districts resemble the younger-grade texts of both social classes. Images of malevolent political leaders are seldom found in second grade books, but they are seldom found in any working-class texts, either. Textbook materials seem to aim at depriving the lower social class child, as he grows older, of the benefits of perspectives that will make him a realistic observer and participant in the political system, while more often making these materials available to older children in higher class districts.

Turning now to the text materials specifically used in our school, we find them to reflect an exaggeration of the above patterns. We found that in these materials, whether from the second, fourth, or sixth grade, children are told that authorities are *never* malevolent, *always* approachable, and almost always accountable: a uniformly (and unrealistic) positive loading. But even more bizarre, children in this district are likely to be told by texts that we live in a pluralistic society where politics are overwhelmingly consensual, *not* conflict-oriented. They also are told that the stress must be placed upon majority rule, *not* minority rights. In fact, this school (which is itself 90% minority) is likely to get less material dealing with the rights of minorities in American democracy than it would in any other public school district in the state (studied by Harrington and Adler, 1971). As Riccards (1972) observed in another study of textbooks, equality and racial toleration are barely even mentioned.

Clearly the textbook content serves to combine the two lessons outlined above: be docile and believe in the symbolic idealized picture of politics. It is not likely to train the child to the nitty gritty of political life. It will come as no surprise to those who see schools as primarily concerned with the status quo, i.e., as conservative institutions, that these poverty children are being excluded from knowledge that could help them more successfully compete for premiums in the political process.

Conclusion

Edelman (1967) argues that much of politics is symbolic. The art of ruling is the art of calling upon the right symbols and ritual observances to legitimize a range of activities (for example, the Department of Defense, Vietnamization). Schools may, therefore, be effectively training children to respond to symbolic ritual in granting legitimacy to activities and to pay less attention to actual behavior (which they might find offensive). At one level, the differences between the manifest and latent occurrences in school would seem to be a powerful impetus for changing the curriculum so that these differences would disappear, yet the differences themselves are masked by legitimizing symbols. Further, these differences actually appear in the larger society as well. Therefore, schools may actually be doing a very *good* job of training children to respond to symbolic ritual legitimizing cues in granting legitimacy and to pay less attention to actual behaviors.

We often hear about the pluralism of American society, but pluralism for what? Cultural pluralism is a cultural diversity. It refers to differences brought about by group norms, resulting in different behavioral styles among various ethnic and linguistic groups. Group identity is nourished; attempts to minimize group differences and achieve melting pot models are eschewed. Our neighborhood is culturally pluralistic, but cultural pluralism must be distinguished from structural pluralism (see Harrington, 1975). Structural pluralism is the differential incorporation (or stratification) of various population categories into the opportunity structure of the society. It prevents some groups from achieving the social and economic and political status which others are able to achieve; racism is an example of structural pluralism. Our neighborhood is separated from the larger society by this structural pluralism. However, it is possible to educate to maintain cultural differences and, at the same time, provide the political learning experiences required to compete successfully for resources. Presumably this prevents cultural pluralism from becoming structural pluralism. But is this in fact likely in the educational system just described?

One final point: we need to move toward a day in which anthropological methodologies and psychological techniques will not be thought of as alternatives but as equally useful and different points in the study of socialization.[6] However, we must emphasize that the individual studies reported here have not been through that full process, that we are dealing with working papers and research in progress. These studies do not pretend to be final answers: they are used instead to raise questions, questions that we feel are important but that for long have not been asked. As research continues, and others begin to replicate our findings, we hope to be better able to describe how education for political behavior occurs. We argued omissions in the present literature. This paper has not adequately filled any one of them, but it has begun to suggest ways to do so.

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6. This point is more fully developed in Gumpert and Harrington (1972) and Gumpert and Harrington (forthcoming).

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